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## THE LITERARY PROBLEMS OF THE BALAAM STORY IN NUMB., CHAPS. 22-24

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Critics agree, with isolated exceptions, that the Balaam story is a compilation of two sources, J and E. In both sources Balak, king of Moab, sends an embassy to Balaam for the purpose of having him come and curse Israel. According to J, the ambassadors come to Balaam with their message (vs. 11), but he declares at once that he is dependent in everything on the will of Yahweh, without whose permission he can not do anything at all (vss. 17, 18). So far we have clear sailing, but now the reconstructionary work begins. Holzinger, who is a good representative, says on the continuation of J: "It is to be assumed that he lets the ambassadors go back, and tells them that he would come if Yahweh should command him to, and that he then starts without consulting Yahweh, enticed by the promised honorarium."<sup>1</sup>

It is necessary to stop here for a moment to note three points: (1) that we have here not something that we find in the text, but something that has to be supplied by the imagination; the hypothesis must assume that the source is fragmentary; (2) that in regard to this assumption it is extremely unlikely that Balaam should have affirmed in the strongest possible terms that he could not come without Yahweh's consent,<sup>2</sup> and should then have gone without taking the trouble of asking that consent; (3) that this is very naturally settled in the text as it stands, if vs. 19 is allowed to go together with vss. 17, 18; Balak inquires again, and is now permitted to go, though not to curse. If he did, however, go *without* inquiring what was Yahweh's will in the matter, the only consistent course for him would have been not to say anything at all about Yahweh's will—and most

<sup>1</sup> "Numeri," in Marti's *Kurzer Handcommentar zum Alten Testament*, p. 109.

<sup>2</sup> Vs. 18: "If Balak should give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not transgress the command of Yahweh my God to do a little or a great thing."

assuredly not in such strong language—but simply to go at once with them.

But to take up the thread of the story of J again. Balaam follows the messengers soon, but by this he provokes Yahweh's anger, and is met on his way by the angel of Yahweh, who orders him home again. He returns home. The disappointed Balak, who has waited in vain, finally decides to go personally to Balaam in order to urge him to come and curse Israel. He goes to Balaam's home and succeeds in persuading him to fulfil his wish; both go together to Moab.

Again, let us notice two points: (1) this trip of Balak to Balaam's home rests on Wellhausen's ingenious interpretation of vs. 37;<sup>3</sup> nothing is said about it in the text as it stands; (2) to make this trip plausible it is necessary to assume that Balaam was sent home by the angel, about which the text is also silent.

How the story of J went on we do not know; what Balaam answered Balak is lost; for vs. 38, in which Balaam says, "Lo, I am come unto thee," is, of course, not his answer according to this hypothesis. How it happened that he did finally go with the king is not preserved, though this would be by all means a very important matter. We are, however, told that he goes with him, and that, instead of cursing, he blesses Israel, chap. 24. So much for the apportionment of J.

According to E, the ambassadors come to Balaam with Balak's message. He asks them to stay with him over night, that he may be able to inquire of Yahweh concerning the matter. Yahweh appears to him and forbids him two things: he must not go with the men, and he must not curse Israel. And he gives him also the reason for this prohibition: Israel has already been blessed, and must therefore not be cursed. Thereupon Balaam sends the messengers home. But Balak thinks that Balaam does not come because he has not shown him enough honor and not offered him enough compensation, and so he sends greater and more honorable princes than before and promises to give him everything he wants, if he will

<sup>3</sup> Wellhausen declares, in effect, that the question of Balak, "Why didst thou not come to me?" implies that Balak has gone to Balaam; for if the two are together and Balaam did not go to Balak, what in the world can we infer but that Balak has gone to Balaam? It is a case of Mohammed's going to the mountain.

only come and curse Israel. Balaam is willing to inquire again. He asks the messengers again to stay over night, and this time Yahweh gives him permission to go, but does not permit him to curse Israel. He may go, but must speak only what Yahweh commands him. So he goes and is met by Balak, who comes to receive him on the frontier. This story of E does not contain the episode of the angel and the speaking ass, and is altogether consistent.

With this we have the present status of the question before us, and we may at once say that several things appear to be clearly made out: (1) that the story of Balaam and his ass (vss. 22 ff.) is not the original continuation of the preceding story as we have it in vss. 2-21; (2) that in vss. 2-21 we have a composite narrative resulting from a combination of J and E; (3) that vss. 22-34 belong to the document J, for we have in them several of J's characteristic marks, as has been pointed out again and again;<sup>4</sup> (4) that there is a strong presumption for the supposition that the beginning of the ass story is still preserved somewhere in the introductory verses (2 ff.).

But the reconstruction of the beginning of that story of J from vss. 2-21 as it has been made by Wellhausen and his followers cannot be correct. The point where the criticism of this theory must set in is in connection with vss. 17 and 18, which, according to it, belong to the introduction of J; for it appears, on closer examination, that these verses do not belong to the source from which the ass story is derived. We have already seen that it is very unlikely that Balaam should have used such strong language in vs. 18, rejecting every suggestion of a bribe and declaring that Yahweh alone had to decide whether he should go or not, and that he should then have gone on his own authority without even attempting to ask Yahweh concerning the matter. One must be very much prejudiced indeed not to see that Balaam's answer in vs. 18, taken by itself, implies either that he knows already Yahweh's will and dares not act contrary to it, or that he does not know it and would have to find it out before undertaking anything. Now, it is interesting to notice that both implications are expressed in the context. According to vs. 12, he knows

<sup>4</sup> E. g., the theophany in broad daylight, the speaking ass (parallel to the speaking serpent, J).

already that Israel must not be cursed because Yahweh has blessed it already; according to vs. 19, he wants to find out Yahweh's will. That the two things are not mutually exclusive in the story is not difficult to see. The first embassy—I take now the story as we have it, not according to the different sources—has been sent home without achieving its desired end. Balaam has had a divine oracle—he must not go with them. The second embassy sent receives the noble reply that Balaam can do nothing against Yahweh's will; which will is, so we must interpret in the light of vs. 12, that he should not go and curse. But then—nothing is said about his being influenced by the great promises—might he not oblige them, after all, by inquiring once more whether Yahweh is still of the same opinion? And was Balaam wrong in his surmise? Vs. 20 tells us that God allows him now to go, though the permission to curse is withheld. All of this shows that there is no reason to doubt that vss. 17 and 18 belong together with vs. 19; i. e., are part of the E narrative and not of the introductory story to the ass episode. This will be even clearer from the following: We might assume either that Balaam went without having received an answer to his inquiry, or that he went in defiance of the answer received. But the latter is barred by the story of the angel and the ass, in which there is no hint that he knew that he was acting contrary to Yahweh's will. The former would not necessarily be out of agreement with this story, for the answer might be supposed to be given in the experiences on the way. Still we wonder why in that case he had not waited for the answer if he had inquired beforehand. Can J have contained any reference either to an attempted or to a disregarded oracle?

This leads naturally to the question: Are there any elements of J contained in vss. 8–21, where this subject of the oracle is treated, that may fitly be regarded as belonging to the introduction to the ass story? In other words, what reason is there for regarding vss. 8–20, the bulk of which belongs to E, as a compilation of J and E? The coherence, unity, and homogeneousness of these verses are such that each verse carries on the preceding, and none may be omitted with impunity, not even vs. 11, for vs. 12 presupposes vs. 11. The progress of the narrative is natural and rapid, and, in the light of the whole story, remarkable. What does it signify, in the light of

this unity, that in some verses we have *Yahweh* and in others *Elohim*? Even Wellhausen and Holzinger admit that no argument can be based on the use of the divine names; nor on the difference in the terms for the messengers. The linguistic argument has indeed, as even some adherents of the prevailing view acknowledge, no force in this case. Taken by themselves, therefore, vss. 8-21 present a unity and exhibit no marks of compilation of J and E. They belong solely to E.

There is however, one argument still to be considered, which is taken, not from these verses themselves, but from vss. 2-7. It is claimed that marks of compilation are apparent (1) in the doublet vs. 3a and vs. 3b, the second half of the verse containing nothing but what we know from the first half; (2) in the irrelevance of vs. 4b after vs. 2; (3) in "the inconsistency of the two definitions of Balaam's home in vs. 5, one clause placing it on the Euphrates, the other in 'the land of the children of Ammon' (so read with  $\tilde{G}$ )."<sup>5</sup> From these points the reasoning goes on in effect as follows: Since vs. 2 refers back to 21: 21 ff. (E), it must come from E; one-half of vs. 3 must also come from E, since the other comes from J. As in 4b Balak is introduced anew, it must come from J, for E has him already in vs. 2. One of the two references to Balaam's home in vs. 5 belongs to E, most probably the one that makes him come from Pethor on the Euphrates, for according to vss. 22 ff. we have the impression that he does not come from so far in J.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Gray, in *The Book of Numbers*, p. 309, in the "International Critical Commentary."

<sup>6</sup> According to von Gall, followed by Holzinger and Baentsch, we have another contradiction in vs. 5. "Clause  $b\beta$  speaks of an invasion into Moabitish territory ( $קָרְבָּה אֶת־עֵין הַנָּרַץ$ ) as Exod. 10:5, J),  $b\gamma$  seems to express that the Israelites camp close by the Moabitish border" (Holzinger, p. 107). Thus "that I may drive it out of the land" in vs. 6 points to J, and so does vs. 4a. If this reasoning holds good, then of course vs. 12 comes from J, for we have there again the  $גַּשְׁ$ , and besides  $קָרְבָּה$  for  $נִכְחָה$ ,  $אֶרְךָ$  for  $נִלְחָם$ ; and if that is so, then vs. 17 belongs also to J, for there we have also  $קָרְבָּה$ . But the question presents itself at once: What is there so distinctive in the phrase  $כִּסְחָ עֵין הַנָּרַץ$  that we must regard it as a sign of a definite writer, J? Because J uses it in Exod. 10:5? What is there so unusual in it to forbid assuming that E might just as well use such a phrase? Again, is it altogether certain that *Moab* is meant by  $עֵין הַנָּרַץ$ ? Is it not rather to be taken more indefinitely as the land in general, especially if we see a reference to the picture of the swarm of locusts in the phrase? And, on the other hand, may we be

It is the difference in the statements about the home of Balaam that is the most important of these marks of compilation. The presumption is certainly in favor of the reading פֶתַח־עֲמֹן of the Samaritan, Peshitto and Vulgate, instead of פֶתַח־עַמּוֹן, and it is assumed to be the correct reading by most critics. It is true we then get a contradiction between the statement that Balaam came from Pethor situated on the Euphrates, and the statement that his native land was Ammon. The question for us now is not the historical one, Which was Balaam's real home? but, How are we to explain this contradiction? For whatever the original idea of the situation of Pethor was (whether in Mesopotamia or in Edom), our story has the two conceptions running side by side that he comes from Pethor on the Euphrates, as appears also from 23:7, and that he does not come from such a great distance, i. e., from Ammon, cf. vs. 22 ff. We have then here a double tradition.<sup>7</sup> And since the one is in agreement with vss. 22 ff., we may see in this clause a piece of the tradition of J. This is the prevailing conception of the critics, and I have no argument against it.

In regard to the argument from vs. 4b, it is true that it comes rather late, but it looks so altogether like a marginal or redactional gloss that it can hardly be taken as indicating compilation.

The question is perhaps not so easily settled with the doublet in vs. 3. It is, of course, not impossible that the same idea may have been expressed twice by the same writer for the sake of emphasis, and it is not to be overlooked that קָרְבָּן in the second half is a much stronger term than בָּרָךְ in the first half. But there is force in Gray's reasoning:

The repetition of the subject *Moab*, and the expression of the object in the second clause by a fresh term *children of Israel*, instead of by a simple pronoun so sure that מִמְרֵל in vs. 5 *over against me* implies *not* in the land of Moab? The distinction drawn between J and E in regard<sup>8</sup> to the Israelites on this basis is artificial and fanciful, and it is refreshing to see that Gray does not even think it worth discussing. The geography of the passage does not help it in any way. It is true we have in 22:36, which is regarded as coming from E, the reference that Balak went to the frontier of his kingdom to the Arnon to meet Balaam. And it is promptly declared that this presupposes that according to E Moabitish territory was not occupied by Israel, but only Amoritish. But the same writer makes Balaam and Balak go *north* of the Arnon in chap. 23!

<sup>7</sup> For the location in the land of the Chaldeans the fame of the Babylonian magicians may account.

referring to the people. . . . point to the fact that the verse combines the similar statements of two sources.<sup>8</sup>

So far one point which has caused commentators a good deal of thought has not been touched upon; i. e., the presence of the Midianites. They are indeed, after all, the only incongruous element in the story. Wellhausen and his followers dispose of them by regarding them as interpolated under the influence of P, in view of the close connection in which Balaam stands to the Midianites in Numb., chaps. 25 ff. The matter should, however, be more carefully considered, for I believe we shall find here the solution of the problem of the sources. The Midianites occur in vss. 4 and 7. Now, if these two verses are taken out of the story, and taken together with those other two clauses that we have already discovered as belonging to J—i. e., vs. 3<sup>b</sup><sup>9</sup> and “the land of the Ammonites” in vs. 5—we have a connected whole, as follows:

(3b) And Moab shuddered with fear before the Israelites, (4) and Moab said to the elders of Midian, Now will “this” multitude lick up all that is round about us as the ox licketh up the grass of the field. (7) And the elders of Moab went with the elders of Midian with the rewards of divination in their hands (5) to the land of the Ammonites (7) and came to Balaam “the son of Beor” and spoke to him.

We have connected here only those elements which are really incongruous with the rest of the verses, and have employed no arti-

<sup>8</sup> P. 323. In passing it may be remarked that, however true in itself it may be, there is little or no force in the observation of Gray on vs. 4, if it is applied as a test of compilation—which, however, Gray does not. “The occasion for the following episode, and the cause of Moab’s fear here assigned, are perhaps not the same as in vs. 2. It is the mere approach, rather than (as in vs. 2) the conquests, of the Israelites.” The two things are not mutually exclusive, and there is no reason *on that score* why vs. 4 should not be the continuation of vs. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Vs. 3<sup>b</sup> is referred to J and not vs. 3<sup>a</sup> because of the פִּרְעָה, which occurs in this meaning besides only in J, Exod. 1:11. It is interesting to notice that some critics apply the linguistic argument with great confidence whenever it suits their theory, but when a really characteristic word such as פִּרְעָה occurs, then they declare it is too risky to build anything on it. I do not mean to say that E might not also have used this term, although it is not a term which everybody would use, just as little as everybody would say in German *vor Furcht erschauern* to express strong fear, though of course anybody *might* say so. It is, however, not of particular importance for our theory whether vs. *a* or vs. *b* belongs to J. As to the connection of the two meanings of פִּרְעָה, “to loathe” and “to fear,” it may be permitted to refer to the sensation of the creeping of the flesh, etc., which accompanies both emotions.

ficial contradictions. It has at once seemed somewhat curious to me, though not sufficiently so to make me think of two sources, that Balak is spoken of in vs. 2, but not in vs. 3; that Moab speaks to Midian and not Balak; that the elders of the Moabites go together with the elders of the Midianites to Balaam. Now, though there is antecedently no objection to identifying the messengers of Balak with the elders of Moab, it is strange for this reason, that the princes of Moab might be called servants of Balak; for they are royal officials; but whether the elders of Moab would be called so is not so certain. Taken by itself, the point may not be of much importance, but its significance will appear at once, when it is recognized that the source J does not mention Balak, the son of Zippor, king of Moab, at all. It is the Moabites who are frightened, not Balak; it is their elders who go to the elders of the Midianites and together with them to the famous seer Balaam in order to receive help from him.<sup>10</sup>

Where, now, is the continuation of J to be sought? It is contained in the parallel verses 6 and 11, but not in the manner that vs. 6 belongs to E and vs. 11 to J. Our theory explains for the first time adequately the change of the singular and plural persons in these verses. It is to be accounted for by conflation. According to E, Balak is the speaker, and he uses the singular; according to J, the elders of Moab are speaking, representing, not the king, but the people, and they employ the plural.

It has already been shown that in vss. 8–20 we have no reason to assume compilation, the evidence for it being altogether insufficient. And we do not need to assume it on our theory. After the elders had told Balaam what they wanted of him—in vs. 7 we have been told of the presents which they had taken with them as an honorarium for the seer, and it is naturally to be assumed that they had given them to Balaam, it would be petty to insist that the author must have told this expressly—Balaam is at once ready. The narrative goes therefore on in vs. 21: “And Balaam rose and saddled his ass and went.”<sup>11</sup> And now follows the story of the speaking ass,

<sup>10</sup> We must read *Balak* instead of *Moab* in vs. 3a; there is external authority for this in a LXX variant given by Field (cited by Holzinger, p. 102). If vs. a belongs to J and not vs. b, then read Balak for Moab in vs. b.

<sup>11</sup> In vs. 21, “in the morning” and “with the princes of Moab” belong to E. Should we perhaps suppose that “princes” should be changed to “elders?”

vss. 22–34. It need not be pointed out in detail that this introduction which our reconstruction of J presents is exactly suited to this story. In its entirety it is as follows:

And Moab shuddered with fear before the Israelites. And Moab said unto the elders of Midian, Now will this multitude lick up all that is round about us, as the ox licketh up the grass of the field. And the elders of Moab went with the elders of Midian with the rewards of divination in their hand to the land of the Ammonites and came to Balaam, the son of Beor, and spoke to him, Behold the people which has come out of Egypt and has covered the whole land; come now and curse it;<sup>12</sup> it may be we are able to fight against it and drive it out! And Balaam rose and saddled his ass and went. And the anger of God was kindled because he was going. . . .

This restoration involves a minimum of changes, yea perhaps no changes at all. It removes from the narrative, vss. 2–20, only really incongruous elements; it assumes no gaps which are to be filled up artificially; and it leaves the other story altogether complete and homogeneous; indeed, so far from giving the impression that anything has been taken out, it reads more smoothly, as will at once be perceived, if vss. 2, 3a, 5, 6, 7b, are read together as follows:

(2) And Balak, the son of Zippor, saw everything that Israel had done to the Ammonites, and (3) Balak was very much afraid of the people because it was [so] numerous. (5) And he sent messengers to Balaam, the son of Beor to Pethor which is on the Euphrates to call him, saying, Behold a people has come out of Egypt, behold it covers the whole earth and is encamped over against me. (6) And now, come, I pray, and curse this people for me, for it is stronger than I; perhaps I may defeat it and drive it from the country, for I know that he whom thou blessest is blest and he whom thou cursest is cursed. (7b) And they came unto Balaam and spoke to him the words of Balak.

Then follows in vss. 8–21 the story of the two embassies, the two inquiries, and Balaam's departure from Moab.

If our hypothesis is correct so far, we may proceed to disentangle the remainder and test at the same time the validity of the conclusions already reached. That vs. 35 does not belong to the original story of Balaam and his ass has been pointed out by others. It is parallel to vss. 20 ff., where E left off. In vss. 35 ff. we have therefore the continuation of E. Indeed, we expect, after the meeting with the angel of Yahweh, whose warriorlike appearance showed that he

<sup>12</sup> Whether it is necessary to change קְבַה־לָנוּ to קְבַה־לִי is hard to tell. It may be a colloquialism.

was ready to fight for Israel, that Balaam should return home and not be allowed to go on. For in vs. 22 God is angry because Balaam was going to Moab; yea the angel would have killed him, if he had gone on. Yahweh's angel has gone to oppose (**נִטְשָׁה**) Balaam's going. And nothing has occurred to change Yahweh's feeling so that he should now be willing to permit him to go. J must therefore have told of Balaam's return to his home. But is this conclusion of J preserved, or have we to supply it from our imagination? From the previous treatment of J by the redactor we expect that it has been preserved somewhere. And so it has been, namely in 24:1. "And Balaam saw that it pleased Yahweh to bless Israel, and so he went not as his custom was to meet omens, but set his face toward the wilderness." Chap. 24:1 is the immediate continuation of the episode of the speaking ass. His experience with the angel showed Balaam that Yahweh was on Israel's side, that he was ready to fight for them. His errand is therefore absolutely useless, and so he does not go as his custom was<sup>13</sup> to meet omens, as he evidently wanted to do in this case also, but sets his face toward the wilderness. That this cannot mean anything but that he turned his back upon Israel is admitted by Wellhausen. The phrase means that he set his face toward the wilderness with the intention of going there; i. e., home.

And then J goes on in vs. 2b: "And the spirit of God came upon him and he said." It is generally accepted that the oracle of 24:3 ff. belongs to J.<sup>14</sup> But it has not yet been pointed out that Balak, the son of Zippor, is not mentioned in the oracles of chap. 24—i. e., in J's oracles—while he is mentioned in both of E's in chap. 23. It is another indication, it would seem, of the correctness of our hypothesis, according to which J does not speak of Balak. The conclusion of the whole story is in vs. 25a, the substance of which belongs, of course, to both sources: "And Balaam rose and went and returned to his home."

This reconstruction rests on two assumptions which must now

<sup>13</sup> This is evidently the meaning of **כַּפְעָם־בַּכְפָּעָם**; cf. our "time and again."

<sup>14</sup> The main reasons for this are (1) the fact that Balaam introduces himself here for the first time, as though this were his first oracle, while it is already his third; (2) the fact that 24:8 f. is essentially like 23:22 f.; in other words, they are variants of an older oracle.

be proved: (1) that 27:1, 2b come from J and not from E; and (2) that there is no trace of J in 22:35 to 23:25.

1. 24:1, 2b come from J. They do not come from E or from the redactor. We are told that Balaam sees now that Yahweh wants to bless Israel.<sup>15</sup> Has he not seen this before? E. g., in 22:12, has he not uttered already the blessing in the second oracle? But, it is said, we have here the statement that he does not go after omens. But has he gone after omens in chap. 23? Are the sacrifices to be classified under the category of omens? Evidently not. Only if we accept von Gall's improbable interpretation of 22:40 (who thinks that the pieces which Balak sent to Balaam are the intestines!) have we any right to think of omens in connection with the first oracles. Why is it said, then, that he does not go after omens, when he has not done so in chap. 23 either? Because we have here another representation of Balaam, which must be that of J. According to E, Yahweh appears to Balaam in the night as he would to any Hebrew prophet. He needs no artificial means—at least we are not informed of any. Yahweh puts his word in his mouth. According to J, he was one of the old Arabic seers who go after omens in order to find out the will of God. It is useless for him to go now because he knows Yahweh's will—it is dangerous, too!—and so he faces around to go home; and then, as he is about to go, the Spirit of God comes suddenly upon him and he utters his prophecy. That vs. 2b belongs together with vs. 1—i. e., to J—is plain, for E uses different phrases for describing the same experience. That vs. 2a belongs to E and not to J is clear, because it contradicts vs. 1, for in vs. 2a he sees Israel encamped according to its tribes—something that we expect in E; but in J he does not look at Israel at all, but faces the wilderness!

2. In 22:35 to 23:25 we have only *one* narrator—i. e., E,—and not a combination of J and E. The main contention centers around 22:35–41. According to Wellhausen, we have here again the two sources: to J belong vss. 37, 39; to E, vss. 36, 38, 40, 41. It ought to be a canon of literary criticism that the assumption of compilation should not be resorted to, if the passage presents real homogeneousness and unity, and that it should first be always attempted to understand the passage as it stands. If it then shows marks of compilation, they

<sup>15</sup> "And Balaam saw that it was good in the eyes of Yahweh to bless Israel. . . ."

should be pointed out and examined; but it would seem that in the whole system of dividing sources we often build on too slender a foundation and are not able to prove our point to an impartial man who refuses to admit that stricter rules of logic should be applied to the products of an ancient Semite than to his own. In other words, he may give a great deal of credit to Wellhausen's acuteness of reasoning in the interpretation of vs. 37, but he will refuse to admit that the verse necessarily implies that Balak had gone to Balaam's home, for the reason that he takes into account the inflection of the voice in the sentence: "Why didst thou not come to me?" He has heard the exact equivalent, "Why didn't you come?"<sup>16</sup> and used it himself, when he meant to imply "at first" or "at once." And he will also refuse to admit that Balaam's answer, "Behold, I have come to thee," is not the real answer to the question, for he himself has received and given the answer, "Well, I have come to you," or "I am here." He is perfectly willing to let the "now" go with the following, because he does not need it to bring out his meaning. We must not forget that we have here in these narratives men who speak naturally and do not hold themselves down to the strictest rules of logic; they speak in the common language of the day. Unfortunately, we do not hear the intonation, the inflection of the voice, and miss a great deal thereby; but we should not overlook that such a thing existed and played an important element in conversation, just as it does today.

But there is another objection to Wellhausen's theory. According to him, Balaam had gone home after the meeting with the angel, and Balak goes now himself to the seer, and succeeds in persuading him to go with him to Moab. But how do Wellhausen and his followers explain this extraordinary affair? What means did Balak use to make Balaam change his mind? The impossible suggestion of bribery is put forward (cf. Holzinger). Think of the situation, and the question forces itself upon you at once: What short of a divine manifestation and the explicit permission to go could account for Balaam's final going after his terrible experience on the way? Surely now we have not simply his declaration of inability to go without divine permission (vss. 17, 18), and his subsequent starting without inquiring what Yahweh's will was. He knows now not only Yahweh's

<sup>16</sup> Cf. the German, "Warum bist du denn eigentlich nicht gekommen?"

will, but also the extreme danger he is in for his own life, if he goes; or would he dare to meet the angel again, who had opposed him with drawn sword, and who had declared that he would have killed him if he had gone on, the ass's resistance alone having saved him? If this objection is squarely faced, we stand before the alternatives, either of supplying another ingenious solution of the problem how Balak succeeded in persuading Balaam to go with him (and that would be rather difficult, if not impossible; for we should not simply have to consult our own fancy, but should have to keep in mind that we are trying to think what J thought); or of declaring that the ass story does not belong to J, because these verses, 37, 39, belong to J; or, what would be the most natural and simple, of declaring that these verses do not belong to J, but to E. Into what a mass of artificial divisions the denial of the ass story to J would lead us need hardly be pointed out. It can really not reasonably be denied.

It should at this point again be remembered that we have to supply a great deal on Wellhausen's theory between vs. 34 and vs. 37, and also between vs. 37 and vs. 39; and the question will surely not be deemed unfair: What was the motive of the redactor in omitting these, to all appearances so extremely interesting and important, matters? What interest could he possibly have had in letting Balaam appear so noble (cf. vss. 18, 38)?

If vs. 37 is taken as coming from E, all these objections vanish. And if vs. 37 is not regarded as belonging to J, then there is no reason for vs. 39 either. Indeed, no reason is given except that it fits together with vs. 37. Gray's additional argument is arbitrary: "If this sacrificial feast be in honor of Balaam's arrival, vs. 39 is in all probability intrusive, since the feast would naturally be made at the place where Balaam and Balak met, viz., at 'Ir Moab (vs. 36)." But why? What hinders us from assuming that Kiriath-huzoth was more convenient for Balak? Unfortunately, the site is unknown. But why should the impression be wrong that it was situated nearer to the place where Balak expected Balaam to curse Israel, and that Balak took him there so that they might be close by Baal Bamoth on the next morning? There is neither necessity nor probability for regarding 22:36-41 as a compilation of J and E. It is a unity belonging to E, as the whole tenor of the passage shows.

In regard to 23:1-6, von Gall tried to prove compilation, and Holzinger thinks it is a fine thing that he did so and gives him great credit for it.<sup>17</sup> But neither Wellhausen nor Baentsch, who wrote as late as 1903, and had therefore considered von Gall's proposal, and who is by no means averse to minute source-divisions, sees in these verses a compilation. After the original order of the verses has been restored as follows<sup>18</sup>—vss. 1, 2 (omit in vs. 2b, “Balak and Balaam”), vs. 4b (from “and they said to him”), vs. 3 (at the end read: “and he went to inquire the command of Yahweh”),<sup>19</sup> vss. 4a, 5, 6—there is not a bit of evidence for the presence of two sources, and none has been adduced by either von Gall or Holzinger. Indeed, on the whole question of the apportionment of chaps. 23 and 24 Wellhausen has seen much more clearly than von Gall (and Holzinger). The latter's theory is so artificial and fanciful that Baentsch rejects it altogether. In the main, Wellhausen's and Baentsch's theory in regard to chaps. 23 and 24 commends itself. There are, however, some points at which it may be improved.

It should be observed that the first poem is no blessing at all, and that it is surprising that Balak should declare in vs. 11 that Balaam has *thoroughly* blessed, בָּרַךְ בָּרַךְ, Israel. We shall have to speak of this again.

That the introduction to the second poem is homogeneous and belongs to E is conceded by Wellhausen and Baentsch. The only question is concerning the clause, “only its extremity shalt thou see and all of it thou shalt not see.” This is regarded by almost all as a

<sup>17</sup> That von Gall and Holzinger differ somewhat in the apportionment of the verses to J and E respectively is of minor interest.

<sup>18</sup> This is already an old proposal.

<sup>19</sup> Volz, who is followed by Baentsch, reads לְשֹׁאֵל פִּי יְהוָה; following the LXX reading ἐπερωτήσαι τὸν θεόν. It is true that LXX has a conflation, for it adds καὶ ἐπορεύθη εὑθεῖαν, which corresponds to the consonantal text of M. T.; and it is also true that LXX did not know—not only here, but also in some other cases—what to do with שְׁפִי, and the ἐπερωτήσαι τὸν θεόν may be merely a guess. But may it not be that we have in שְׁפִי an abbreviation for שְׁאֵל פִּי יְהוָה, the first letter of the three words being used as abbreviations י פ ש? We should then have a contraction by a copyist in M. T. I am, of course, aware that this principle of textual criticism does not go unchallenged. Many deny the use of abbreviations, but when we have, in addition to internal evidence, also the evidence of the LXX, the argument in favor of it is materially strengthened. At any rate, it would seem that the LXX, if they did not read שְׁאֵל פִּי יְהוָה, regarded שְׁפִי as an abbreviation for the phrase.

redactional gloss, and rightly so, for it is plain that E means to say that Balaam will see the whole people from the new place to which Balak is going to bring him. But since he makes them change places still another time, the redactor put in this little sentence in order to save his climax; for there would be no necessity for another change, if it were stated that Balaam saw the whole people already from the second place. Now, the change to the third place is not original in E, but is due to the redactor, who wanted to combine the two sets of oracles; vss. 25-30 are generally regarded as coming from him. It is also generally understood that the defining clause "that overlooketh Jeshimon" in vs. 28 belongs originally after "Pisgah" in vs. 14, with which it is also connected in Numb. 21:20. The redactor transferred it to vs. 28, in accord with his above-mentioned scheme. But if E originally declared that Balaam was going to see the whole people from the Pisgah, it is evident that he must have stated that he saw it after his arrival on the mountain. Nothing of the kind is contained in the verses before us, and yet the redactor has preserved it, namely in 24:2a, "And Balaam lifted up his eyes and saw Israel settled according to its tribes." *Chap. 24:2a belongs to E and stood originally directly after 23:14.* In the place where it now stands it is part of the introduction to J's oracle. The redactor placed it there because it suited his introduction to the third poem. Originally it was part of E's introduction to the second poem in 23:18ff.

As has already been said, 23:25-30 are regarded as coming from the redactor. The only objection to this is in connection with vs. 25, where Balak exclaims, "Thou dost neither *curse*, nor dost thou *bless*!"<sup>20</sup> The device of getting sense out of this sentence by omitting the first negative and translating, "thou shalt curse and not bless!" is too drastic. Baentsch thinks Balak meant, "Thou shalt do neither the one nor the other." But the fatal objection to this is that Balaam has already blessed Israel, and, knowing the efficacy of the once spoken word of blessing or curse, we cannot assume that Balak said anything so strange. The whole trouble is really due to the redactor, for the verse belongs originally after the first poem. We have already noticed that the first poem contained neither a curse nor a blessing, and the situation is this: Balaam has pronounced his first

<sup>20</sup> "Curse" and "bless" are very emphatic in the Hebrew text.

poem; Balak is astonished that he has neither blessed (i. e., of course, him and Moab) nor cursed (Israel),<sup>21</sup> and tells him so; whereupon Balaam answers that he can say only what Yahweh tells him. Balak assumes that the place might make a difference, and brings him therefore to a mountain whence he can see the whole people. Balaam now proclaims his second oracle, in which he announces Israel's success and blessing. The continuation of E after the second poem is contained, not in the immediately following verses, which belong to the redactor, who combines by means of them the two sets of poems, but in 24:10 ff.<sup>22</sup> Balak becomes exceedingly angry, for he had not called him to bless but to curse Israel, and sends him away in his wrath, refusing to give him any of the promised compensation (cf. 22:17, 37). Whereupon the seer has his vengeance on him (a delicate touch of human nature, and therefore certainly belonging to the original story of E!)<sup>23</sup> by declaring not only that he had told him beforehand that he could not do anything against the will of Yahweh, but by giving him another oracle free of charge, this time proclaiming what Israel would do to Moab later on:

There shall come forth a star out of Jacob,  
And a scepter shall rise out of Israel,  
And shall smite through the corners of Moab  
And break down all the sons of Sheth(?)<sup>24</sup>

This oracle contained in 24:17 belongs to E and not to J. Addis had already perceived that the oracles of E could not have ended in chap. 23. "The Elohistic account," he says in the *Encyclopædia Biblica*, "of the prophecies must, however, have made some references to Moab, and must therefore have contained more than is now given in chap. 23." This something more is contained in 24:17. That 24:17 does not come from J is plain from two things: (1) J has already a close parallel to this in 24:7; (2) the linguistic

<sup>21</sup> Should we perhaps read: "Thou dost neither curse him, nor dost thou bless me"?

<sup>22</sup> Of course, the "*these three times*" in vs. 10 belongs to the redactor, as is generally conceded.

<sup>23</sup> It is very unlikely that the redactor should have written vs. 14. It is too natural and fits too well into the narrative, especially when it is seen that the oracle in vs. 17 belongs to E and not to J.

<sup>24</sup> For a reconstruction of the text cf. below.

argument refers it to E. Compare with it 23:9, 10, which come from E, and note the parallelism and identity of expressions and order in אֶשׁוּרָנוּ and אַרְאָנוּ. That this final oracle in vs. 17 is so short finds its explanation in the nature of the situation: it is Balaam's parting shot at Balak! And as such, of course, the shorter the more effective it is. The end of E's narrative is contained in 24:25, "And Balaam rose and went and returned to his place, and Balak also went on his way."

The question remains, in regard to the rest of the oracles, whether they belong to J or E, or whether they are later additions. It is customary nowadays to refer them to very late times. They have absolutely nothing to do with either J or E, or with any pre-exilic writer. The reason for this is twofold: (1) the linguistic argument worked out especially by von Gall; (2) the historical argument based on the interpretation of the oracles themselves. But it must be confessed that the linguistic argument is absolutely unconvincing, and in connection with the historical argument we must first look at the text, for these oracles are in a notoriously bad condition textually. Perhaps it is not out of place here to emphasize that the presumption is to regard these oracles as belonging either to the one or the other of the two sources to which the narrative belongs so far. If there are difficulties in the way of this assumption, arising from certain definite historical references which at once relegate the verses to a later time, then, of course, they are to be so regarded; but the presumption is not in favor of a late, and certainly not an extremely late, date. It is necessary to bear this in mind, because there is a tendency at the present time to regard *a priori* everything as very late, unless it can be proved to be early. The presumption in a case like the present lies in the other direction.

In regard to the text, then, there are the following observations to be made:

24:17c:

יִמְתַּח פָּאֵתִי מִזְּאָב  
וַיִּקְרֹךְ כָּל-בְּנֵי-שֵׁת

The second half is not clear. The Massorites seem to have regarded וַיִּקְרֹךְ as a verb meaning "to break down," denominative from קִיר (Gray): "And he shall break down all the sons of Sheth."

But from Jer. 48:45 וְקִדְךָ has been emended into קִידְךָ. The difficulty is in שַׁתָּה. It appears to me that we must regard שַׁתָּה as containing originally a verbal form from a synonym of מִזְחָה, so that we should have

And he shall smite through the temples of Moab,  
And the skull of all his sons shall he shatter.

Either קִידְךָ פָּלֶבֶנְיָה יְפֵתָה or שָׁבֵר בְּתַחַת would do.<sup>25</sup> or with prophetic perfect בְּתַחַת.

24:18, 19. This oracle has been beautifully reconstructed by von Gall. The only thing that does not seem to be necessary is the transposing of the verses, for there are enough other examples of this parallelism where the first line corresponds to the fourth and the second to the third.

וְהִיא אֲדוֹם יְרֻתָּה  
וַיִּשְׂרָאֵל עֲשָׂה דָּיוָל  
וַיַּרְדֵּן יַעֲקֹב [בְּ] אַרְבָּוֹ  
וְהַאֲבִיד שָׁרֵיד שָׁעֵיר

And Edom shall become a possession (i. e., of the enemy),  
While Israel doeth valiant deeds,  
And Jacob shall trample down his enemies  
And destroy the survivors of Seir.

24:21, 22. The literal translation,

Еver-enduring is thy habitation  
And placed in the rock thy nest,  
Nevertheless is Kain doomed to destruction  
How long? Ashshur shall carry thee captive!—

is awkward in the last line, which is in all probability corrupt. We may perhaps suggest the following emendation:

M.T.

עֲדַמּוֹת אֲשֹׁור תִּשְׁבַּח  
עֲדַמּוֹת אֲשֹׁור שְׁבַּחֲךָ

How long shall I (still) see thy dwelling?

This would put the fourth line in sharp contrast to the first line: "Ever-enduring is thy habitation, O Kain."<sup>26</sup> Ever-lasting? Do

<sup>25</sup> Or should we think of כְּתַחַש with its pounding and crushing?

<sup>26</sup> Baentsch adds correctly קִינָן to the first line, which brings out beautifully the word play between קִינָן and קִינָן.

not be mistaken. It shall be utterly swept away. Not a vestige shall remain! And how soon that will come about!

אָזֶן מֵי יְהוָה מִטְמֹן אֵל  
וְצִים מִיד פְּקִים  
רַעֲפָר אַשְׁוֹר וַעֲפָר עַבְרָר  
וְגַסְדְּדוֹא עָרֵי אַבְדָּן

This may be translated:

Alas! who shall live after God hath appointed him?  
But ships from the side of Kittim  
Shall afflict Ashshur, and shall afflict 'Eber;  
And he also (shall be) unto destruction.<sup>27</sup>

"This is commonly understood to mean: How terrible will Assyria be! none will expect to escape her power! Yet she will perish at the hands of the Kittim." But "no overthrow of the Assyrian empire by the western maritime peoples is known."<sup>27</sup> The conclusion to which scholars have come, that the existing text is more or less corrupt, is inevitable. But none of the emendations offered, however brilliant some of them may be, have commanded assent. It is with a good deal of misgiving that I venture to propose another emendation, but I do so in the hope that it may appear also to others as somewhat more probable than the former.

In the first line, read instead of **מִטְמֹן אֵל** the very similar **תְּמִטְמֹות אֵל**, the only difference being the **ת**.

וְצִים מִיד כְּחִים  
וְצִיא מִיד פְּקִים

The differences in the consonants are here also slight. The **ם** in **וְצִים** is probably due to dittography.

רַעֲנוּ אַשְׁוֹר וַעֲנָר עַבְרָר  
וְעַם נְשָׁאָר וְעַם נְעָבָר

The differences here appear to be greater at first sight than they really are. The only considerable one is the **ע**.

If we take these altogether, we have an oracle which may be translated as follows:

Alas! who shall survive God's destroying  
And escape from the shatterers' hand?<sup>28</sup>  
Even a people that is left and a people that is passed over—  
It also is doomed to destruction!

<sup>27</sup> Gray.

<sup>28</sup> The **כְּחִים** are El's agents.

Whatever may be objected to this reconstruction, it certainly gives good sense and provides us with the climax that we expect in this seventh and last utterance. That the narrator or redactor did not see in the poem a definite people addressed is clear from the introductory formula, "And he took up his oracle and said," while we have in the other cases, "And he saw the Amalekites, the Kenites, and took up his oracle and said." We have here, then, a summary of the wonderful victories of Israel condensed in these four lines. Not only the Moabites, Edomites, Amalekites, Kenites; no, every people is to go down before the advance of this great nation, for whom God himself is fighting!

If these textual suggestions hold good, there is no reason for assigning these oracles to a late post-exilic date.<sup>29</sup> There is no historical consideration whatever that prevents our regarding them as belonging to J. The redactor found them already in J. He has, indeed, separated 24:7 f., to which they belong, from them and made in this way a fourth oracle and inserted short introductions in vss. 20, 21, 23. But he has still given us a hint that he took them from J by introducing them with J's opening formula, 24:15, 16 = 24:3, 4.

Of course, the question will at once be asked: Is it then to be supposed that all these passages are original Balaam oracles? That is not asserted. All that is maintained is that the redactor found there oracles already connected with J and E respectively, when he combined the two. It is not denied that they do not belong to the original Balaam story. On the contrary, there is a good deal in the suggestion (cf. Holzinger) that there was originally only one Balaam oracle, and that around this original oracle as a nucleus there grew later additions both in J and in E, but these additions are already earlier than the combination of the two stories by the redactor.<sup>30</sup>

The most striking passage in the whole story is the episode of the speaking ass. In it we have the master of the art of story-telling in the Old Testament, J, at his best. Once read or heard, the story can never be forgotten. The narrative in J moves rapidly in the beginning till we come to this part; then all the incidental figures,

<sup>29</sup> And even if they do not hold good, the arguments for a late post-exilic date are too precarious to be relied on.

<sup>30</sup> A few suggestions on this original oracle will be found at the end of this article.

the elders of the Moabites and Midianites, and Balaam's own servants, are dropped, and the whole attention is focused on the ass, the angel, and Balaam. We are in a fairy-land; the ass can speak! J takes time to describe the whole situation in detail; he is in no hurry now. He means that his hearers and readers should appreciate the humor and seriousness of the story: the ass far-famed for his stupidity is wiser than the seer far-famed for his wonderful wisdom; the ass sees the vision long before the seer! The anger of Balaam and the conversation of Balaam and his ass are full of humor and pathos. The angel of Yahweh appearing in broad daylight with drawn sword opposing the ass and the seer; the threefold repetition of it and its insistent emphasis; the stupidity of Balaam who cannot see that something unusual is going on; the sternness of the angel's speech; his compassion for the ass contrasted with Balaam's cruelty; the seer's confusion and lame excuse—all are masterly portrayed. J's descriptions are as keen and his delineations as sharp as if they were etched in steel. And the underlying ideas! Balaam is not a Hebrew prophet, but one of those ancient Arabic magicians or seers. He looks for omens. He sets out to curse, but the Spirit of God comes over him with overpowering force and he must bless! A strange, but interesting and important, theory of inspiration! And the angel! He is regarded as ready to fight for Israel—an embodiment of the ancient conception of the warrior Yahweh. But the most interesting figure is by all means the ass. She is unusually clear-sighted, and with what profound logic the beast talks! She tells Balaam what conclusions he should have drawn from the experiences on the way! It was easy to overdraw this feature and make the whole grotesque, and a lesser artist would have done so; but J never makes that mistake. How the Israelites must have enjoyed his story! And how much we also still enjoy it when we take it for what it is—not history, but legend!

In E we are in a different world. No speaking ass, no angel with sword in broad daylight, no magician! Balaam is like a Hebrew prophet; Yahweh appears to him in the night, and puts his word into his mouth. No compensation can allure him to do anything against God's will; like Micaiah ben Imlah, he declares that he can do only what Yahweh wants him to do. In sharp contrast to him

stands Balak, the king. He is materialistic; he thinks money is powerful enough to procure him even divine favor; he judges Balaam by himself when he thinks the man probably wants more money and honor. His servants are like him in this respect. They tell him not a word about *divine* prohibition. He is superstitious, believing not only in the power of the blessing and curse, which highly advanced prophets also did, but in the importance of the right place for the curse. He changes places for that reason. He is disappointed, angry. In J Balaam is angry. Both writers picture the emotion well. E uses Balak as a contrast to Balaam. Here the materialistic, superstitious king; there the noble prophet who does only Yahweh's will, even though it may be against his material advantage. The one touch of humor in E comes in at this point. When Balak in his anger and disappointment does not wish to give the seer any compensation for his troubles, Balaam gives him another oracle without money as a parting shot! We touch here the important characteristic of E's narrative; he pictures the human emotions of fear and anger, of hope and disappointment, of resentment and revenge, materialism and idealism, superstition and faith. The age of the charming fairy-stories is past for E; he is a theologian. But not yet one of the blue type; his men are men of flesh and blood, with human passions and shortcomings.

That the redactor could not well discard any element of these two different stories is evident. Underlying both of them is Yahweh's care for Israel and the idea that, if God is for Israel, none can be successful against it, and even the enemy is used by him to bring about Israel's glory. The redactor has succeeded very well. The unevennesses are few. His literary tact is great; he omits very little, and is so skilful in the compilation that he succeeds in producing another climax. His composite work is beautiful because of his tact and skill.

It has already been mentioned that the suggestion has been made that we should assume only one original oracle of Balaam, which forms the nucleus of all the oracles contained in chaps. 23 and 24. Perhaps we may still be able to point out the original oracle, or at least the main component parts of it. In the following some suggestions along this line are offered. But, before proceeding with them, one passage must be considered in regard to its text. The importance of this will appear at once. This passage is in 24:7a.

24:7a.

יְזִיל־מֵים מַדְלָיו  
וּזְרֻעָו בְּמִים רַבִּים

The literal translation,

Water flows down from his buckets  
And his seed is in many waters—

gives no sense. LXX reads ἔξελευσεται ἀνθρωπος ἐκ τοῦ σπέρματος αὐτοῦ καὶ κυριεύει ἔθνῶν πολλῶν, which presupposes a consonantal text in Hebrew very much like the Massoretic, which is placed under it to show the slight differences:

יְאֹזֶל אֲרֹשׁ מַזְרָעוֹ וּמִמְשֵׁל בְּעָמִים רַבִּים  
רַזֵּל מֵים מַדְלָיו וּזְרֻעָו בְּמִים רַבִּים

For the omission of the נ in יְאֹזֶל compare Jer. 2:36. The נ shows that the words were displaced. The changes are slight. Gray thinks that “*ἀνθρωπος* is probably a paraphrase for water, and *σπέρμα* for bucket,” (!), and a little later he says: “*זְרֻעָו his seed*, can just as well be punctuated *זְרֻעָו his arm*, of which *גָּדָס κυριεύει . . .* may be a paraphrase” (!).

In view of the second half of the stanza, where we have a celebration of the monarchy in the words

His king shall be higher than Agag  
And his kingdom shall be exalted,

it is very likely indeed that the LXX text is right here, when it begins with

A man shall proceed from his seed (posternity),  
And shall rule over many nations.

This text gives sense, while the Massoretic text gives none; it is in harmony with the second half of the verse, and therefore what we expect. Moreover, it has the support of the LXX.

It is true אֹזֶל has an Aramaic flavor, but it occurs also in a pre-exilic passage, 1 Sam. 9:7, which is sufficient to establish its pre-exilic use. But, in addition, another consideration may be made. Is the use of just this word not intentional to give the saying that little touch of the foreigner which the Israelites would recognize at once, and is not the same also true of דָּד in vs. 17? Such considerations have received too little attention in the past, but their force should be recognized in Hebrew, as it is in other literatures.

Now we may turn to the consideration of the original oracle of J and E. Since it is quite natural to assume that there was originally only one oracle underlying the various poems that we now have, it has been suggested that we must look for the original element in the verses that are parallel in J and E; in other words, to 23:22, 24, on the one hand, and 24:8, 9, on the other. On the basis of this, I venture to propose a reconstruction, the purely hypothetical character of which I duly appreciate. Dogmatic certainty is here altogether out of the question.

First let us place the passages side by side.

E

God who brings them out of Egypt  
Is like the horns of the wild ox to him.  
Behold (it is) a people like a lioness, stand-  
ing up,  
And like a lion, lifting itself up.  
It does not lie down till it devour the prey  
And drink the blood of the slain.

J

God who brings him out of Egypt  
Is like the horns of the wild ox to him.  
He devours nations his adversaries  
And breaks their bones  
And shatters his oppressors.  
He has crouched, lain down like a lion,  
And like a lioness, who dares stir him  
up?

It is evident that we have here simply variants of the same original. That of E is somewhat smoother. But it is extremely difficult to decide which stands nearer to the original. Perhaps we do well to look first at the second part of the oracle, for I believe there was a second part to it. This underlies the parallel verses 24:7 and 24:17. That this has not been suggested before is due to the fact that both these verses have hitherto been regarded as belonging to J, which we saw good reason to doubt. To J belongs 24:7; to E, 24:17. They are therefore parallel verses in J and E, respectively, and can and must, if the suggestion on which we are building is sound, be used with just as much right for the reconstruction of the original oracle as the verses in chaps. 23 and 24, respectively. It should, perhaps, be added that the parallel character of these verses did not appear so clearly before as it does in the reconstruction which has been proposed above. The verses are:

24:7

A man shall proceed from his seed,  
And he shall rule over many nations,  
And higher than Agag shall be his king,  
And his kingdom shall be exalted.

24:17

A star has shone forth out of Jacob,  
And a scepter has arisen from Israel,  
And he smites through the temples of  
Moab  
And shatters the skull of all her sons.

That these two passages are strictly parallel, and therefore variants, can hardly be gainsaid. At the same time, it appears impossible to say which represents the underlying original more nearly. But it should be noticed that J's oracle looks rather as if it were directed specially, though not exclusively (cf. l. 3), against Amalek and not against Moab, Agag being an Amalekitish king,<sup>30</sup> while we expect from the prose narrative that Moab should be especially mentioned, just as is done in E. It looks, therefore, as if the last two verses of E stood nearer to the original than the corresponding lines in J.

It will be noticed that this stanza consists both in J and in E of two double-lines, and we may naturally infer from this that the first part of the poem was

<sup>30</sup> The various proposals to get rid of Agag do not appeal to me. I regard the Hebrew text as correct.

written in the same strophical manner. Based on this, I would offer tentatively the following reconstruction of the first part:

God who leads it (Israel) out of Egypt  
Is like the horns of the wild ox unto it.  
Behold (it is) a people like a lioness, standing up,  
And like a lion, lifting itself up.<sup>31</sup>  
  
It devours nations its adversaries<sup>32</sup>  
And breaks their bones  
And shatters its oppressors  
And drinks the blood of the slain.

<sup>31</sup> Variant: "It has couched, lain down like a lion  
And like a lioness, who dare rouse it?"

<sup>32</sup> Variant: "It does not lie down until it devours prey."